

Donnybrook

9 October 2021

Welcome

Our Gospel today contains two beatitudes – but not the usual ones. In both the Old and the New Testaments, there are very, very many beatitudes, much more than the eight we usually remember. The book of the Psalms opens with a Beatitude and the last chapter of the last book has a beatitude. It can be translated in various ways: blessed or happy are very common. Recently I came across a translation which translated as follows: flourishing are they who... to me that sounds about right.

Steps

The second beatitude in today's Gospel reads: 'Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!' We could translate it as follows: still more flourishing are those who hear the word of God and keep it.

The future of the Christian community will be founded on the rediscovery of the Scriptures because the regeneration of faith can have no other genesis. This has been affirmed since Vatican II and by all the bishops of Rome since then. Our current holy father once even distributed Gospels in St Peter's Square.

How can we hear the word of God? I think we need to things. Firstly, there is a need for a wider education about the Scriptures – time, context, issues, culture and so on. A good study Bible would provide a great deal of that. There are many, many online resources – so many it can be hard to choose. No shortage, however.

Our second step is to pray the word so that it remains not simply a document from the past but a place of encounter in the present. As Catholics, we are familiar with the idea of sacrament, especially the Blessed Sacrament. It would help if we could think of the Scriptures as a kind of Sacrament. As Vatican II put it, Christ is present when we read the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Many centuries ago, a great bible scholar who died in the middle of the third century wrote a marvellous prayer to be used before reading the Word of God:

Lord, inspire me to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give me real understanding of what I read, that I in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet, I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart. Amen. (Origen, 184-253 AD)